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ABSTRACT

Two distinct lines of inquiry have explored factors contributing to children's social competencies. One line of study has documented a relationship between children's social problem-solving skills and behavior in peer interactions. The second line of inquiry documents an association between child-rearing practices and children's social competence. The relationship of child-rearing practices and children's social problem solving skills has been investigated in only a few studies. This study examined the relationship among parenting practices and children's social problem solving skills. Twenty mothers and their preschool children participated. Maternal child-rearing practices were assessed by means of the Block Child-rearing Practice Report Q-sort. Children's social problems solving skills were measured by means of the Rubin Social Problem Solving Test. Significant correlations were found between maternal variables and the nature of strategies generated by the preschoolers. Children whose mothers expressed negative feelings about their child were more likely to utilize stop action goals, while children whose mothers were protective of them were more likely to choose attention seeking goals. (ABL)

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Maternal Child-rearing Practices and Children's Social Problem Solving Skills

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Maternal Child-rearing Practices and
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Abstract

This study examined the relationship among parenting practices and children's social problem solving skills. Twenty mothers and their preschool children participated. Maternal child-rearing practices were assessed by means of the Block Child-rearing practice report Q-sort. Children's social problem solving skills were measured by means of the Rubin Social Problem Solving Test. Significant correlations were found between maternal variables and the nature of strategies generated by the preschoolers. Children, whose mothers expressed negative feelings about their child, were more likely to utilize stop action goals; and children, whose mothers were protective of them, were more likely to choose attention seeking goals.

Maternal Child-rearing Practices and Children's Social Problem Solving Skills

Two distinct lines of inquiry have explored factors contributing to children's social competence. One line of study has documented a relationship between children's social problem-solving skills and behavior in peer interactions (Denham & Almeida, 1987; Dodge, 1986). The second line of inquiry documents an association between child-rearing practices and children's social competence. In general it is the authoritative parenting practices which are associated with the more positive social development in children (Baumrind, 1967; Puttalaz, 1991). Given that early family experiences play an important role in the development of children's social skills, and that effective social problem solving skills contribute to social competence, it is reasonable to conclude that parenting practices may influence children's social competence by promoting the development of social problem solving skills.

The relationship of child-rearing practices and children's social problem solving skills has been investigated in only a few studies. For the most part studies have focused on maternal discipline practices and children's generation of strategies in response to hypothetical social situations (Brown, 1989; Pettit, Dodge, Brown, 1988; Spivack & Shure, 1978). What other parenting practices such as encouragement of independence, expression of affect, and maturity demands may promote prosocial and flexible

social problem solving in children? This study will further current knowledge by exploring the relationship of such parent variables to children's social problem solving skills.

METHOD

Subjects: Twenty preschoolers (10 males and 10 females) and their mothers were recruited from three different neighborhood babysitting coops. All participants were from white, middle to upper middle class, suburban families.

Maternal variables: Each mother was asked to complete the Block Child-rearing Practices Report (CRPR) Q-sort using the standard procedure for administration (Block, 1981). Previous factor analyses of the 91 items in the CRPR Q-sort have yielded 21 scaled scores (Block, 1981). Of these 21 scales, 17 were of interest in this study. (See Table for list).

Child variables: Child outcome measures were obtained by means of the Rubin Social Problem Solving Test (SPST-R) (Rubin, 1988). Each child responded to five illustrated stories involving a peer problem. Three of the stories asked what a child could say or do to resolve a conflict with a peer. The other two stores asked how a child might gain entry into an ongoing peer play group.

The standard procedure was used for administration and coding of goals, total number of strategies, and quality of strategy (prosocial, aggressive, authority intervention, and

trade/negotiation). Children's ability to identify alternate strategies when confronted with an obstacle was measured by a flexibility score. Summary scores for all variables were obtained by summing across the five vignettes.

RESULTS

To determine the relationship among maternal child rearing practices and children's social problem solving skills Pearson Product moment correlations were computed. Results are presented in two separate tables. The first table addresses the relationship among maternal child-rearing practices and children's flexiblity and the quality of children's strategies in response to the hypothetical peer problems.

Table 1.

Correlation of Maternal variables and Children's strategies

Maternal Variables	Strategies				
	Flexib	Prosoc	Aggres	Author	Trade/neg
Encourage experience	.225	.238	.268	-.237	.124
Rational guiding	-.065	-.186	.183	-.031	-.220
Expression of affect	.001	-.215	-.043	.194	.040
Enjoy parent role	.222	-.121	.247	.170	.132
Nonpunitive punishment	.036	-.287	.047	.369	.006
Supervision of child	-.414	.044	-.390	-.144	-.400
Suppression aggression	.304	.127	.025	.311	-.048
Encourage independence	.223	.176	.441	-.232	-.168
Emphasis on achievement	-.007	.416	-.534*	-.124	-.170
Overinvestment	.469*	-.113	.203	.506*	.429
Guilt induction	-.003	-.146	.162	.037	.025
Inconsistency	-.139	.127	.030	-.247	-.048
Protectiveness	.021	-.004	-.268	.241	-.152
Anxiety induction	-.264	-.077	-.214	.091	-.191
Authoritarian control	.066	-.099	.283	-.161	.446
Negative affect	-.243	-.057	.045	-.229	-.129
Early training	-.001	-.019	.250	-.189	-.039

*p<.05

Summary: Mothers who described themselves as being too involed with their child and tending to indulge their child had children who were more flexible in in their problem solving and had children who were more likely to appeal to an authority figure to resolve the peer dilemma.

Mothers who placed a strong emphasis on their child's achievement had children who were less likely to suggest aggressive strategies.

The second table focuses on the correlation of maternal child rearing practices and the nature of the goals for the strategies generated by the children.

Table 2.

Correlation of Maternal variables and Children's goals

Maternal Variables	Children's Goals							
	Stop action	Self action	Other action	Obj. acq.	Atten/ Ackn.	Affect/ comft	Infor seeking	Non-s ini
Encourage experience	.226	-.225	.198	-.178	-.086	.128	-.038	.41
Rational guiding	-.204	-.280	.245	.073	.149	.138	.248	.09
Expression of affect	-.101	.103	-.109	.047	-.403	-.045	.051	.16
Enjoy parent role	-.144	-.303	.131	.104	.189	-.025	.169	.13
Nonpunitive punishment	.409	-.303	-.137	.001	-.001	.346	.204	.08
Supervision of child	.074	-.263	.171	.096	.129	-.229	-.133	.34
Suppression aggression	-.130	.128	-.217	.072	-.161	-.259	.392	-.37
Encourage independence	.336	.003	-.026	-.351	-.146	-.037	.078	.14
Emphasis on achievement	-.353	-.061	-.236	.302	-.055	-.385	-.016	.34
Overinvestment	.168	-.039	.004	-.026	.086	-.090	.256	.28
Guilt induction	-.135	.150	-.226	.181	.087	.135	.003	-.31
Inconsistency	.102	-,297	.207	.059	.298	.383	.076	-.12
Protectiveness	.046	-.051	.004	.007	.447*	-.015	-.118	-.17
Anxiety induction	-.168	.019	.132	.166	.137	-.295	.128	-.40
Authoritarian control	-.103	.103	-.108	-.054	.015	.104	.056	-.05
Negative affect	.473*	-.026	-.054	-.227	.305	.205	-.287	-.04
Early training	-.141	.408	.004	-.022	-.245	.424	-.260	-.19

* p. < .05

Summary: Mothers' expression of negative affect toward her child was related to children's choice of stop action goals. Mothers who described themselves as highly protective of their child had children who chose attention seeking goals in peer situations.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings of this study support findings of previous research linking specific parenting practices and children's social development. Mothers who value and expect earlier achievement of social skills have children who master these skills at an earlier age. In this study mother's emphasis on achievement was negatively associated with children's generation of aggressive strategies.

Mothers allowance of autonomy is related to children's social competence. Overcontrolling parents have withdrawn children. In the current study mothers who described themselves as highly protective of their child had children who chose attention seeking goals in peer situations, which is characteristic of the isolated, withdrawn child.

Mothers' expression of negative affect toward her child was related to children's choice of stop action goals. This result supports findings that parental hostility and disagreeable behavior in parent child interactions is predictive of children's poor social adjustment in peer relationships. These children are found to be more disruptive in the classroom, and more unfriendly in peer interactions. Stop action goals are characteristic of disruptive, aggressive children.

The present study found some relationship between maternal child rearing practices and children's social problem solving skills. Specifically, relationships existed in the nature and goals of the strategies and parenting practices. These results show support for previous studies and add data as to the process

by which maternal child rearing practices are associated with children's social competence.

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